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AUTHOR Coleman, Toni; Soley, Lawrence
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ABSTRACT

At the AEJMC (Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication) convention, concern was voiced about the news media's ability to present fair and accurate news about minorities. Accordingly, a study examined whether college journalism and communication departments have established multicultural committees to establish and implement diversity goals. The study also compared schools with and without cultural diversity committees to see whether the committees do help in setting and achieving goals. Questionnaires were first sent to administrators to ask about the existence of committees in charge of multiculturalism; then a followup survey was sent to the chairs of the committees. Of the 370 questionnaires initially mailed to administrators, 246 were returned; 205 reported that they did not have curriculum diversity committees. Of the 40 followup questionnaires sent to chairs of diversity committees, 12 were returned. Of the 40 questionnaires sent to a control group of administrators whose institutions did not have diversity committees, 9 were returned. Of the 12 from committee chairs, 2 denied the existence of the committee, suggesting it existed just on paper. At the 10 institutions with functioning committees, these committees merely had advisory powers; none had the power to change curricula. Two of the 10 institutions reported that their committees had developed a reference list of reading and audio-visual materials, had brought multicultural speakers to their school, and were involved in course enrichment. (TB)

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BRINGING MULTICULTURALISM TO JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION PROGRAMS:

A Study of the Uses and Functions of Multicultural Committees

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By

Toni Coleman (Grad Student)

and

Lawrence Soley (Faculty Member)

Marquette University

College of Communication

Milwaukee, WI 53233

CS215100

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BRINGING MULTICULTURALISM TO JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION PROGRAMS: A Study of the Uses and Functions of Multicultural Committees

Abstract

This study presents a survey of journalism school administrators, who were queried about whether their units had committees dedicated to multicultural issues and diversity. Only 16.67 percent reported that they had such committees. A follow-up survey, sent to the chairs of these committees and a control group of administrators, showed that the committees had little power, and few had actually developed multicultural courses or acquired materials for use in classes. Overall, little is being done to bring a multicultural perspective to journalism education.

At the 1990 AEJMC convention, concern was voiced about the news media's ability to present fair and accurate news about minorities. Conference attendees noted that as the U.S. evolved into a multicultural society, the news media's composition and stereotypical presentation of minorities showed that the media were not keeping up with these changes. A panel suggested that college journalism and mass communication programs require cultural and cross-cultural course work to insure that future journalists are prepared for a multicultural society. One way to achieve this, a panel member observed, was to give high priority to recruitment, scholarships, journalism workshops and culturally-related events (Stein, 1990).

While journalism and mass communications programs at predominantly white universities need to adopt a multicultural approach to education, there has also been a push to strengthen the quality of journalism education at historically black institutions. The Association of Black College Journalism and Mass Communications Programs is leading the effort by encouraging professional journalists to teach at black universities, and working to increase the number of accredited journalism programs at historically black institutions (Fitzgerald, 1992).

A study by Liebler (1993) found that predominantly black colleges are making a considerable effort to integrate the journalism field, conferring 22.6 percent of the total number of degrees conferred on black students, while non-black universities are lax in their efforts to integrate undergraduate journalism

programs. Of the degrees conferred at predominantly white institutions, 5.1 percent of recipients were black, 2.4 percent Hispanic, 2.1 percent Asian, and .3 percent Native American, well below minority representation in the general population. Liebler (1993) also showed that other college programs, such as social sciences and psychology, were better integrated than the journalism programs.

Diversity within the journalism profession depends on applicants graduating from journalism programs. For this reasons, Kern-Foxworth and Miller (1993) conducted a survey study of journalism and communication schools to determine how successful journalism programs were in bringing a multicultural perspective to their curricula, and increasing minority enrollment at predominantly white university programs.

Their survey of 300 ACEJMC accredited journalism programs, which had a response rate of 53 percent, suggested that little progress was made between 1982 and 1991. Although 71 percent of the 160 respondents felt that an increase in recruitment and retention efforts of minority students was very important, and 68 percent felt it important to recruit and retain minority faculty, few colleges had explicit programs to achieve these goals. At least 48 percent of the schools did not sponsor a minority communications organization, and only 5.7 percent offered a minorities and the media course. The rarity with which a minorities and media course was offered is explained by the attitudes of the respondents -- only 36 percent felt that a multicultural course addressing issues of diversity, sensitivity

and stereotypes was important.

Programs that are known to effect minority student retention were even rarer. About 62 percent of the schools failed to offer counseling, 76.3 percent failed to offer tutoring, and 91.4 percent failed to support study groups for minority students (Kern-Foxworth and Miller 1993).

Kern-Foxworth and Miller (1993) expected multicultural journalism education to be improved from 1982. However, they found "that the status of multicultural education has deteriorated rather than proliferated during the decade under investigation, 1982-1991." Among other recommendations to integrate journalism programs, the authors suggested that schools create a multicultural affairs committee that would provide recruitment and retention support and programming for multicultural students and faculty. The purpose of a multicultural affairs committee is to ensure that diversity goals are set, and to see to it that efforts are made to achieve these goals -- something that has been consistently lacking at a majority of journalism schools.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether journalism and communication departments have established multicultural committees to establish and implement diversity goals, as Kern-Foxworth and Miller (1993) suggested. The study also compares schools with and without cultural diversity committees to see whether the committees do help in setting and achieving goals, as Kern-Foxworth and Miller (1993) suggested they should.

METHOD

The study was conducted in two steps. First, a survey study of the deans and chairs of journalism schools and colleges of communication was conducted, inquiring as to whether their unit had a multicultural curriculum committee within it. If the college or department had such a committee, the administrator was asked to identify the committee chair. Second, a different questionnaire was later sent to the heads of these committees (and a randomly selected control group of administrators), asking them about the efforts to diversity the curriculum within their administrative units.

In the first stage, a self-administered questionnaire was mailed to the deans of colleges of communication, the directors of schools of journalism, and the chairs of departments of journalism listed in the 1993-1994 *Journalism and Mass Communication Directory* published by AEJMC. When a university listed several administrative units, as did California State University at Chico and the University of Southern Mississippi, the questionnaire was sent to the ranking administrator. In these cases, it was the dean of the college and director of the school, respectively. Questionnaires were not sent to the heads of English Departments or other non-communication departments, such as at Southern Louisiana University, Black Hills State University, and Eastern Michigan University, even though they are listed in the directory as teaching journalism courses.

The cover letters and questionnaires, in the form of a self-addressed, stamped postcards, were sent to 370 administrators.

The cover letter explained that we were "conducting a study of the efforts made by journalism and communication departments to diversify their curriculum." The cover letter asked the administrators to complete "a very short questionnaire concerning multiculturalism in communication curricula," and asked them to return it to us.

The questionnaire asked respondents to identify their institution, and then asked, "Does your school/department/sequence of journalism/mass communication have a multicultural committee, as opposed to an affirmative action committee, that examines ways to integrate multicultural issues in the curriculum?" The respondents were asked to answer "yes" or "no" to this question and, if they answered "yes," to identify the chair of the committee.

Four months after the initial questionnaires were sent out, a second cover letter, questionnaire and SASE was mailed to every individual identified by their administrator as the head of a committee concerned with curriculum diversity. The cover letter explained how their name was obtained, and stated that "we would like more information about your committee, its mission, its activities, and the execution of committee decisions." The cover letter asked the identified individuals to complete the questionnaire and "return it to us at your earliest convenience."

The questionnaire asked respondents to identify their institution and the proper name of their committee. Open-ended questions about the mission, powers and budget of the committee followed. Respondents were also asked about the "topics or

issues" that the committee addressed, and the "programs or changes that [the] committee has initiated" within the curriculum. Lastly, respondents were asked about "materials, such as books, videos and other classroom aides," that the committee had purchased, and to evaluate them.

At the same time that these questionnaires were sent to the committee chairs, a similar cover letter and questionnaire was sent to administrators at universities that did not have multicultural committees. These questionnaires also asked about "topics or issues concerning multiculturalism that your faculty has discussed at faculty meetings," "the programs or changes that concern multiculturalism" that were instituted in the administrator's unit, the budget available "for purchasing multicultural materials, such as books and videos," and how they evaluated these materials.

RESULTS

Of the 370 questionnaires initially mailed to communication and journalism administrators, 246 were returned, for a 66.46 percent response rate. Of the 245 responses, 205 (or 83.33 percent) reported that they did not have multicultural or curriculum diversity committees. Only 40 (or 16.67 percent) reported that they did.

Questionnaires were then sent to the multicultural committee chairs at the 40 universities, and to a control group of administrators at 40 others. Of the 80 questionnaires sent, only 21 were returned, producing a response rate of just over 25 percent (see Table 1). Twelve of the responses were from the

chairs of multicultural committees and nine were from

Table 1

	responses	no responses
With committee	12	28
Without committee	9	31

administrators at universities without multicultural committees. The differences in the response rates were not significantly different (x^2 = .58, d.f. = 1).

Of the twelve responses, two denied the existence of a multicultural committee in their department, suggesting that at these institutions, the committees are just on paper. At the ten institutions with functioning multicultural committees, the committees merely have advisory powers; none have the power to change curricula.

The missions of the committees were to "promote sensitivity to minorities and women in journalism," "promote interest and participation in diversity programs," "recruit minority faculty and students," and "promote the development of multicultural courses." Of the ten, only three reported that they had actually developed a multicultural course, and only at one of these universities was the course made a requirement.

Two of the ten chairs reported that their committees had developed a reference list of reading and audio-visual materials, brought multicultural speakers to their school, and were involved in "course enrichment" and "infusing" multicultural issues into the curriculum, although what this entailed was never described.

At Brigham Young University, the college developed an exchange program with a predominantly minority university, a high school program for minorities, including workshops, scholarships, and mentoring. The University of Texas at Austin reported that it was involved in the publication of a minority newspaper and offered "five courses (three undergrad, two grad) dealing specifically with multicultural and/or women's issues."

Of the nine responding administrators at universities without multicultural committees, five stated that they had initiated "informal" efforts to diversify the curriculum. At department meetings, one school said they discussed the integration of multicultural material into classes, another discussed student recruitment, and another discussed the need for a more ethnically diverse faculty. One school discussed involvement in a campus-wide retention program for minority students and promoted faculty participation at campus-wide cross-cultural programs.

Few actual changes were actually initiated within the curricula of schools that did not have multicultural committees. Only one school without a committee offers a multicultural course and recruits multicultural guest lecturers, and one school reports that it infuses multiculturalism into some of its courses by utilizing "non-western attitude theories and international case studies." One school is developing a course on women and the media, while the others simply encourage faculty to integrate multicultural issues into their courses.

Both groups, the universities with multicultural committees

and those without, were asked if they had a budget for purchasing materials, such as books and videos, that would help the faculty integrate multicultural issues into the curriculum. Only three schools had specific budgets that would help integrate multiculturalism into courses, suggesting that schools are not dedicated to this mission, particularly when it comes to money.

When asked to provide a list of their multicultural classroom materials and an evaluation of these, only one school with a committee and one school without provided an actual list. One simply reported that they had "good stuff," and another reported they had "good material," but did not provide a list or even one example.

CONCLUSION

Kern-Foxworth and Miller (1993) suggested that the development of a multicultural affairs committee at journalism programs would be the starting point in integrating journalism programs, thereby integrating the journalism field. As we move toward a multicultural society, journalism programs still fail to produce graduates who can function in such a society. As the research shows, 83.33 percent responded that they did not have a multicultural committee that could ensure that diversity goals are set and achieved.

When a more extensive probe of the schools with committees was done with a follow-up questionnaire, the response rate was incredibly low, 12 out of 40. When the control group of schools without committees were asked what they did to integrate multiculturalism in the absence of a diversity committee, the

response rate was again very low, 9 our of 40. If the response rate of a survey is a measure of interest, then journalism programs exhibit little interest in the topic of diversifying the communications curricula.

Furthermore, schools with committees listed a profusion of goals for the multicultural committee, but with only advisory powers, but few of these goals were being met. The impact of these committees are minuscule, as shown by the rarity of multicultural communications courses, the deficiency of a budget and lack of multicultural materials used to integrate courses. Overall, journalism programs are doing little to promote multiculturalism.

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